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## THE NOVELS OF CHATEAUBRIAND.

The nineteenth century is preëminently the age of the novel. What Voltaire could call the work of one writing with facility things unworthy to be read by serious minds has become so predominant in France as almost to absorb in popular literary consciousness all forms of imaginative writing except the drama. This is a tendency that was manifest at the outset of the century, and it has been growing in force ever since. Among the factors that have combined to produce the change are doubtless the spread of superficial culture, the great cheapening in the cost of production of books and the readier means of diffusion by post and railway. The French newspapers, too, by their *feuilletons* have added greatly to the production of fiction, though they have tended to lower its literary standard. But more important perhaps than any of these factors is the fact that fiction has come to reflect popular emotions and states of mind. The novel of the romantic school was to be lyric in its style, personal in its appeal. Herein lies the cardinal importance of Chateaubriand to the development of French fiction. He took up the torch of Rousseau that was already burning low and fanned it in a serener air, to a fuller flame.

The century in fiction opens with the publication of his *Atala* in 1801, followed in 1802 by *René*, both short stories but of far reaching influence and most characteristic of the mood of the next generation and of this author who was its most eloquent representative. He was a Breton noble, Francois René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), born at St.

Malo, "within hearing of the waves" as he liked to say, on the fourth of September, 1768, the birth-year of Napoleon, to whom he was also wont to take this occasion to compare himself. Neither mother nor father seems to have been a wise or genial parent, and his chief if not his only childish affection was for a sister, Lucile, a frail, nervous invalid who died young. The relation was certainly morbid, and later in his life Chateaubriand was pleased to surround it with a sort of incestuous halo that he might explain by this aberration of youth the fascinating indifference that characterized his own relations to women in after years and found their fullest expression in his *René*, the most strongly marked character, in a sense we may say the only character, of his fiction.

He was himself an intense and somewhat morbid youth, and his early training could not but foster such tendencies. He passed his childhood in an ultra-catholic environment, listening to the strange legends of the childlike Breton people or nursing meditation by the boundless and mysterious ocean. As a boy he went to various schools, but all within the Breton spell, and then to the gloomy ancestral castle of Combourg; no wonder that his twentieth year found him untaught, timid, eager and gloomy, above all dissatisfied with all that life gave or promised. He was suffering already from that *maladie du siècle* of which it is impossible not to speak at some length in judging Chateaubriand, but which we shall perhaps treat more profitably if we first trace the course of his life until, with the fall of Napoleon, the man of letters was absorbed in the politician. He tried to go to sea and got actually as far as Brest, he contemplated suicide; then his friends got him a position in the army, and on the eve of the revolution the young man found himself transported from the solitude of ocean and forest, from the most backward province of France, to Paris, the focus of the intellectual and political world.

The effect, as was natural, was immediate and strong. Its literary significance, however, lies in the strength of the

reaction that followed and in the literary stimulus that his associations gave him. He learned to know most of the chief writers of the time, Parny the poet, La Harpe the critic, the two Cheniers, Chamfort the acute philosopher, and most important of all to him, Fontanes, who was the discoverer of his genius, his unswerving friend, and always a shrewd adviser. He began intense though unsystematic studies. Ignorant at twenty, his *Essay on Revolutionary* published at twenty-nine shows a remarkable mass of information, which indeed was never fully assimilated. But acquaintance with the great writings of the century aroused in him, as greatness always did, mingled admiration and envy. Could he not, he seems to have said to himself, catch the imagination of Rousseau and use it to controvert his ideas and so to destroy his ascendancy? Could he not eclipse Bernardin de St. Pierre by borrowing his style and making it the bearer of sturdier thought? There remained Voltaire whose wit he could not borrow. Against him and his ideas he would wage a moral war and win for himself the mantle of Bossuet. Such seem to have been the literary impulses that he gathered from four intoxicating years. Then in 1791 as the clouds of revolution thickened he set sail for America, where he had a commission to search for the North-West passage, obviously a mere pretext. He travelled more or less widely in the United States, met Washington and, according to his own account, which is never above suspicion, saw Labrador and the Great Lakes, the prairies of what was then Louisiana, and the semi-tropical forests of Spanish Florida. Here he might observe the "state of nature" as Rousseau had dreamed and Bernardin described it. Here the morbid imagination of his youth was vivified by contact with a primeval world and untutored man. He was gone but a year and landed again in France in January, 1792, but that year gave him the scene and the direct inspiration for the greater part of his fiction and the indirect inspiration for the rest.

The execution of Louis XVI. made Chateaubriand an

*émigré*, he was wounded in the expedition against Thionville, went to England in 1793 and remained there till 1800. It is unnecessary to dwell here on the writings of these years or on his rather disgraceful adventure *à la Saint-Preux* with the daughter of his host at Bungay. It was however during this period of exiled poverty that he wrote the "Natchez," a huge manuscript of 2,383 folio pages, in which he strove to involve his impressions of America and of life. Of this far the greater part was not printed till 1826, but it served as a sort of storehouse from which he drew successively *Atala* (1801,) *René* (1802) and considerable parts of the *Genius of Christianity* (1802). This last lies outside our immediate field. Chateaubriand's other contributions to fiction are *The Martyrs* published in 1809 and *The Last of the Abencerrages* written about the same time but not printed till much later. To these last two works he brought the added experience of two years of official life at Rome, but he seems to have welcomed the murder of the Duke d'Enghien as an excuse for resuming a haughty opposition to Napoleon, "who," as he somewhat fatuously assures us, "made the world tremble, but me never." Yet these works were not the immediate result of those years but of what he called a *Journey from Paris to Jerusalem*, a trip undertaken partly to gather materials for the *Martyrs*, partly at the suggestion of a lady who was not quite ready to yield to his seductive *morgue* and who met him on his return in the Alhambra, where for some years their names could be deciphered together. I mention this because the intermingling of sensuality and religious sentiment is as constant in Chateaubriand as it was in Bernardin and Rousseau. It is not difficult to distinguish the pinchbeck from the gold but it is well to call attention to it. Persons who desire details can find them in the discrete revelations of Sainte-Beuve and Villemain.

Thus much of the life of Chateaubriand is necessary to any understanding of the ethical purport of his novels. We must now dwell briefly on the contents of the novels that

we may the better comprehend the cause and nature of their influence. *Atala* purports to be a story told at the close of the seventeenth century to a melancholy young Frenchman, René, in whom the author intends that we shall see himself. It is narrated by the old indian Chactas who has been in France in the *grand siècle*, has talked with Fénelon, listened to Bossuet and to Ninon, seen the tragedies of Racine and acquired enough of civilization to combine an Homeric simplicity of picturesque imagery with the dainty refinements of the Hôtel Rambouillet. All of which is ridiculous enough, but it serves Chateaubriand's purpose which is to bring civilization and the "state of nature" into more effective contrast than Rousseau or Bernardin had done. For Chactas, knowing the best that culture has to offer, deliberately prefers the wilderness, as does René himself and, as Chateaubriand gives us to understand, he would do also were it not that a weary condescending charity forbids him to deprive society of his presence. Both Chactas and René have had experiences somewhat similar to that of Chateaubriand and Lucile. René loves his sister, Chactas a young indian girl who has sworn perpetual virginity. He is a captive among her nation. She saves him and to save herself they are forced to fly together. The solitary journey of the young lovers, for she returns his affection though guarding her vow, is described with a lingering dalliance that some take for sentimental purity and others for lurking lubricity. As Joubert said, the passions here are "covered with long white veils." If it be urged that to the pure all things are pure, it may be replied that we know Chateaubriand is not in that category. However the pair come at last to the mission station of Father Aubry the counterpart of Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar and Bernardin's Solitary Walker. There Atala who "had extreme sensitiveness joined to profound melancholy" presently died of a disease that poets call unrequited love and doctors by another name. She is a martyr to a romantic and therefore false conception of duty, but this while it might detract now from the interest of the story, added

greatly to its charm in 1800, in a generation already predisposed to that *maladie du siècle* of which Chateaubriand was in part the first talented exponent and in part the cause.

This is even more clearly the central point of the interest of *René*, a second fragment detached from the *Genius of Christianity* in 1807, probably because its author felt that it would appeal to many who did not fancy the religious dilettantism of the latter work and would offend perhaps some that the other attracted. The hero of this tale, as the name implies, is the person to whom *Atala* had been related, namely Chateaubriand himself, as he aspired to be or to be thought at twenty-three. He is a young Werther, full of discouraged world-pain such as was forced on many men of genius, first by the revolt against the dry rot of eighteenth century philosophy, then by the lie direct given to the utopian dreams of the reformers by the bloody saturnalia of the revolution. Where men a decade before had felt full of hope and strength, they felt now, at least those of more delicate organization, for it is they alone who had literary genius at this time, helpless and hopeless. From this results an anxious introspection and an eager utterance of egoism that had begun with Rousseau and culminates in Chateaubriand and in Byron. Chateaubriand like all the victims of the *maladie du siècle* are prisoned in themselves. All their invention consists of creating a new environment for their individuality. Hence the growing predominance in fiction of local color. As Brunetière says "wherever the poet sets up the scenery of his work he is and remains its centre."

Doubtless other agencies contributed to evoke this state of mind in Chateaubriand and in those who read *René* with eager enthusiasm. Among these it is probably safe to reckon, with Brunetière, the new cosmopolitanism that had inoculated the literature of France with a virus from the north that was contrary to its nature and so for the moment toxic. The interest in foreign literatures, the knowledge of English and German masterpieces through translations, which grew more frequent throughout this generation,

troubled as it were the equilibrium of the French genius. Speaking of a period a little later, and of the novel *Obermann*, George Sand says: "Ambitions have taken on a character of a feverish intensity, minds overwrought by immense labors have been suddenly tried by great fatigues and piercing agonies. All the springs of personal interest, all the forces of egoism, extremely developed under great tension, gave birth to unknown ills for which psychology had as yet assigned no place in its annals." Of this malady all sensitively organized natures seem to have felt more or less since the days of Werther and Saint-Preux. Goethe threw off the disease and attained an Olympian calm, Rousseau became mentally deranged, Bernardin was saved from it by his fatuity, Chateaubriand wrapped himself in egoistic indifference, and in *René, or the Effect of the Passions* he has given us the most noted French exposition of this state of soul. It is this that made him the father of romanticism, of which Sainte-Beuve quotes an anonymous wit as saying that "Rousseau had been the grandfather and Bernardin an uncle who had come back from India for the purpose."

But whatever may have been the ancestry of *René* the posterity is neither scanty nor doubtful and, though the influence was almost wholly evil and obviously so, yet its influence was so great and it so sums up and characterizes the morbid virus of romanticism that it is well to let *René* tell his story, as far as may be in his own words as he sits with his old friend the now blind Chactas and the good but stern mission-priest Souel by the banks of the Mississippi, regarding the world with indifference and his wife and child near by with a weary ennui of which we may read particulars in the Natchez quite worthy to rank with the rankest *fleurs du mal* of Baudelaire.

René is a character with whom it is hard to feel respect or patience, a man of brilliant genius who becomes the spendthrift of his talent through a complete lack of even a rudimentary sense of social duty or self-control. He has an



utter lack of will, being indeed a monstrosity of egoism, very like in this to Chateaubriand, so self-absorbed that nothing outside himself seems worth desire or contemplation. Chateaubriand has told us of himself that "people wearied him by dint of loving him," and it was with a somewhat similar condescension to the solicitations of his friends that René at last consented to tell them "not the adventures of his life, for he had experienced none, but the secret sentiments of his soul," of which those of his kind were always replete to nausea. He describes himself at the outset, very justly, as "a young man without force or virtue, who finds in himself his own torment, and has hardly any evils to bemoan save those that he had himself caused." We know that Chateaubriand was uncongenial to his parents. René too has no sympathies in childhood, but it is because he has cost his mother her life and his father has died in his arms while he was still young. As Chateaubriand owed what he was pleased to imagine his conversion to the emotions attending the death of his mother and sister so René receives from his father's death his first presentiment of immortality. The effect of religion, so called, on character was about equally absent in both cases. Chateaubriand could not describe that of which he knew nothing. His character never attained an adult development. It was neither christian nor pagan, but hermaphrodite. And so was René's. In youth this young hopeful "used to go apart to contemplate the fugitive clouds or to hear the rain fall on the foliage." Naturally therefore when he stood before "the entrance to the deceptive paths of life" he cared to enter on none of them. The monastic life, being the most obviously unnatural and apparently useless, attracted him most but "whether through natural inconstancy or prejudice" he changed his plans and resolved to nurse his melancholy on the relics of antiquity, "but he grew weary of searching in these grave-clothes where too often he stirred only a criminal dust." He sums up his impression of modern Europe by describing the view from the crater of Etna where on

the one side all Sicily lay before him in miniature and on the other its entrails burning amid puffs of black vapor ; and he continues :

“ A young man, full of passions, seated on the brink of a volcano, weeping over mortals whose dwellings he could hardly see at his feet, is doubtless, old men, only an object worthy of your pity, but whatever you may think of René, this picture offers you the image of his character and of his existence. Thus all my life I have had before my eyes a creation at once immense and imperceptible, and an abyss yawning at my side.” Then after a rhetorical pause, seeing that they actually took him seriously “ his face grew tender, tears flowed from his eyes and he cried : Blessed savages. Oh why cannot I enjoy the peace that accompanies you always. While with so little profit I journeyed through so many countries, you seated tranquilly beneath your oaks let the days pass uncoun ted. Your only motives were your needs and you attained better than I the result of wisdom, as a child between his play and his sleep. If that melancholy that is engendered by excess of happiness did sometimes touch your souls you soon issued from that passing sadness and your eyes lifted to heaven sought with emotion that unknown *je ne sais quoi* that takes pity on the poor savage. . . . The study of the world had taught me nothing and yet I had no longer the bliss of innocence.”

I suppose one may regard this as in some ways a test passage. Those who like that sort of thing will like the *Natchez* and the rest, those who find it irritating will, if they are readers, prefer to direct their attention elsewhere and if they are students, will admire the form while regretting the pernicious teaching that it masks.

At Paris René found he was only “ belittling his life to bring it to a level with society,” in the country he was “ fatigued by the repetition of the same scenes and ideas.” No wonder that after amusing himself by throwing leaves into a brook he reflects : “ See to what a degree of puerility our proud reason can descend.” René had reached this point in his mental and moral degeneration when he began to feel the desire of sharing it with another. His feelings, here too, are a curious perversion of mingled christianity and paganism. “ Oh, God,” René exclaims “ if thou hadst given me a wife after my desire, if as to our first parent so to me thou hadst brought an Eve drawn from myself ! Heavenly beauty, I should have prostrated myself before

thee, then taking thee in my arms, I should have prayed the eternal to give thee the rest of my life."

This is Chateaubriand's ideal of romantic love. As Sainte-Beuve says, (*Causeries*, ii. 151) "what he sought in love was less the affection of such and such a woman than an occasion of agitation and fantasy, it was less the person that he sought, than the regret, the recollection, an eternal dream, the cult of his own youth, the adoration of which he felt himself the object, the renewal or the illusion of a cherished situation." This appears in the relation of Chactas to Atala, it reappears in the Velléda episode of the *Martyrs*, and especially in the astonishing later "relation," for it would be hardly just to speak of *love* in connection with René or with Chateaubriand, that unites René to Céluta. To this we shall recur presently. For the moment René finds in the kisses of his sister, Amélie, the Lucile of fact, the nearest approach to contentment of which his distorted heart was capable. "In this delirious state," he says, "I almost came to desire to feel some evil that I might have at least a real object of pain." His sister shares his incestuous feelings but, with more perspicacity and decision than Chateaubriand would have though sympathetic in his blasé hero, she takes refuge in a convent. She writes to him, painting to him the charms of matrimony with a quivering pen that at the close almost betrays itself in the exclamation: "She will be all love, all innocence before you; you will think that you have your sister back again." But her separation from her brother is only for a time, the same cradle held them in childhood and the same tomb shall soon unite their warm dust. "If I snatch myself from you in time it is only that I may be joined to you in eternity." Meantime she makes the sensible proposition that he should adopt some profession, a suggestion that he must have received with a languid smile. He visits the convent as Amélie is making her monastic profession, and hears her ejaculate beneath her shroud: "God of mercy, grant that I may never rise from the funeral couch, and crown with thy

blessings a brother who has not shared my criminal passion."

René now resolves to abandon civilization, but while waiting for his ship he "wanders constantly around the monastery" reflecting that "here religion lulls the sensitive soul in sweet deception. For the fiercest loves she substitutes a sort of chaste glow in which the virgin and the lover are fused in one." But Amélie finally died, very much as Atala had done, and René seems to have thought it proper to spend the rest of his life in diffusing a general atmosphere of unhappiness around him. Of this we learn chiefly from the *Natchez*.

The *Natchez*, it may be explained, are a tribe of Indians, now extinct, into which René has been adopted. This has compelled him to take a wife, Céluta, from among them, but nothing could compel him to act like a christian or even like an *honnête homme* to her or to their child. Such a conversion as Chateaubriand describes his own to have been implies far less depth of heart than shallowness of mind. "I became a christian," he says in his preface to the *Génie*; "I did not yield, I confess, to any great supernatural illumination, my conviction came from my heart, I wept and I believed." So it was with René and, as Sainte-Beuve says, his letter to the wife he has abandoned dated "from the Desert on the thirty-second snow of my existence" is on this subject the confession of the author's own heart. He tells this mother of his daughter that he does not love her, that he has never loved her, that she does not and cannot understand a heart "whence issue flames that lack aliment, that would devour creation and yet be unsatisfied, that would devour thee thyself." When he is gone, he tells her she may marry, but he adds in the next paragraph that he knows she will not, "for who could environ you with that flame that I bear with me even though I do not love." Of course we may say this is the height of fatuousness, but the intimate history of Chateaubriand would justify René, for more than one woman seems to have loved Chateaubriand's

disdain, though Chateaubriand certainly would not have classed his own spouse with the gentle Céluta.

As for René he assures his long-suffering wife that the trials of his life, which seem to us to be mere figments of a morbid fancy, are such that "they might win a man from the mania of life." He would like he says "to embrace and stab her at the same instant, to fix the happiness in your bosom and to punish myself for having given it to you," precisely as Atala had desired "that the divinity might be annihilated, if only pressed in thy arms I might have rolled from abyss to abyss with the debris of God and of the world." All of which is much more suggestive of the Marquis de Sade than of the Sermon on the Mount. Again in another place René exclaims "Let us mingle sensuous joys (*voluptés*) with death, and let the vault of heaven hide us as it falls." Which again suggests a certain chapter in the *Wandering Jew* far more than any chapter of any gospel. Sainte-Beuve says that in writing thus Chateaubriand gave passion "a new accent, a new note, fatal, wild, cruel, but singularly poetic. With him there always enters into it a wish, an ardent desire for the destruction and ruin of the world." But in doing this he only reproduced a phase of mediæval satanism, and if satanism is poetic our sanity can only protest that that is so much the worse for poetry.

René finds the world so out of joint that "he is virtuous without pleasure and would be criminal without remorse." He wishes he "had never been born or might be for ever forgotten," even by his daughter. "Let René be for her," he writes to Céluta, "an unknown man whose strange destiny when told, may make her ponder, and know not why. I wish to be in her eyes only what I am, a sad dream." Which after all is merely another way of saying what we knew before that Chateaubriand preferred to charm the imagination than to win the heart. "He made of everything, even of filial sentiment, a subject of self-glorification and

vanity.”<sup>1</sup> That Chateaubriand’s absent hero presently perished in a massacre of the Natchez was surely no loss to the world though Céluta seems to have caught the contagion of his folly and drowns herself at the news of her release.

I have thought it worth while to dwell at some length on this ethical phase of *René* both because I am convinced that it has autobiographical value and also because the daughter that he abandoned was by no means the only progeny of that melancholy hero. Years afterward, Chateaubriand, still posing as an *ennuyé*, wrote: “If René did not exist, I would not write it, and if it were possible to destroy it I would destroy it. A family of Renés in poetry and prose has swarmed. We have heard nothing but tearful, disjointed phrases.” “Evidently,” comments Sainte-Beuve with a healthy scorn, “René did not wish to have any children,” and to judge by the way in which Chateaubriand treats Rousseau and Bernardin, he “would have preferred in literature to have no father.”

*René* and the *Natchez* are then as melancholy a travesty of christian feeling as *Atala*. They are wholly morbid and essentially immoral, but also essentially autobiographical in their psychology. Their charm and their popularity depended on their morbidity, which flattered an exceptional state of the public mind, and on their imagination and style to which we shall recur after speaking of the second group of Chateaubriand’s fiction, the stories that resulted from his visit to Palestine. These are *The Last of the Abencerrages* and *The Martyrs*. Both may be briefly dismissed. The former is more plaintively morbid than the American stories. The young christian girl Bianca de Bivar and the gallant Moor Aben-Hamet love one another, but associations, parents, religion, combine to frustrate their love and he finally seeks a vain consolation in a pilgrimage to Mecca. Essentially then the situation is the same as in

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<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries*, ii. 155.

*Atala* and *René*, namely, the conflict of passion with duty or superstition or convention. All are elegies of self-torture, of which the chief cause was lack of common sense. And the same may be said for *The Martyrs* where the two episodes that give it its character as a novel, the unrequited love and suicide of the druidess Velléla and the unfulfilled loves of the virgin Cymodocée and Eudore, are characterized by the same teasing sentimental toying with sensuality. Even when at the close, the "martyrs" are about to be devoured by the wild beasts of the circus, Eudore

"takes off his mantle, covers with it Cymodocée so as the better to hide from the eyes of the spectators the charms of the descendant of Homer, when she should be dragged over the arena by the tiger. Eudore feared that a death so chaste might be sullied by the shadow of an impure thought even in others. Perhaps, too, it was a last instinct of nature, a manifestation of that jealousy that accompanies true love even in the tomb."

This citation may serve also to suggest the purpose of the narrative which, with *Atala*, *René* the *Abencerrages* and the *atchez*, but on a broader field than they, is intended to bring two modes of life or of ethical conception into juxtaposition and contrast. As there it had been the civilized and the savage or the Christian and the Moorish, so here it is the *épopée* of rising christianity and sinking paganism that he sings in rhythmic prose. Indeed *The Martyrs* is *The Genius of Christianity* in action. The time is that of Diocletian. The real subject is the contrast between the christian and the pagan morality, and, what is more interesting to Chateaubriand, between the ways in which this morality manifests itself in ceremonial and sacrificial worship. For it is much less important to him that the faith he advocates should be true to salvation than that it should furnish occasion for æsthetic pleasure and pathetic emotions, that it should afford him what he describes in *Atala* as "the secret and ineffable pleasures of a soul enjoying itself." The various scenes and descriptions are bound together by the tale of the chaste loves of Eudore, the christian, and Cymodocée, the descendant of Homer, a priestess and late con-

vert. There is also a druidess of less uneasy virtue than Cymodocée, Velléda, whom passion leads to suicide, for Chateaubriand seems to think no hero or heroine of interest, that does not somehow make shipwreck of his life or fortune in some sort of crusade against common sense.

Clearly the nearest antetype of *The Martyrs* is Fénelon's *Télémaque*. Like that work it is made the vehicle of much chronology and geography, we are carried from the Netherlands to Greece, from Rome to Egypt, we are introduced to nearly all the prominent characters of the Antenicene church and, by a daring anticipation, to some of the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century also. But the great fault of the book is its rythmic style that hovers between prose and poetry in a way most exasperating to the modern reader. Chateaubriand may have meant to show us "the language of Genesis beside that of the *Odyssey*." As a matter of fact his invocations to the Muse, his scenes in heaven and hell and his spice of the marvellous, supposed to be necessary to the making of an epic *ragout*, seem singularly flat to modern taste, while on the other hand it must be admitted that certain passages especially the *Chants de la patrie* (books 6 to 10) give us perhaps the high water mark of Chateaubriand's prose style.

It is this style, this art of language that is Chateaubriand's chief title to literary remembrance. His thought was very largely morbid. It is hardly worth while to enquire how far he was sincere or capable of sincerity. In society and in ethics he was a *poseur* whose fatuous conceit is endurable now only to those who have ceased to take him seriously. But he was an incomparable artist in words. And if he fell sometimes on the side to which he inclined and erred by excess of ornament, his genius was guided, guarded, saved from itself by two critical friends, Fontanes and Joubert, whose delicate taste he trusted and whose discreet counsels he gladly accepted, much to the gain of his artistic reputation. His remarkable gifts of vivid description and eloquent appeal, thus restrained from too



obvious excess, produced a style of which the effect can be felt throughout the century. Thierry tells us how passages from the *chants de la patrie* in *The Martyrs* inspired him to write his *Récits mérovingiens* and even declares that all the typical thinkers of the first third of the century "had had Chateaubriand at the source of their studies, at their first inspirations." Nisard, too, thought that "the initial inspiration as well as the final impulse of all the durable innovations of the first half of the century in poetry history and criticism" were due to him; to Villemain he was "a renovator of the imagination" and to the cautious Sainte-Beuve "the first, the most original and the greatest writer of imagination" during the first half of the century. The fruits of this stylistic emancipation of individualism may be seen even in our time. Chateaubriand is the essential prelude not only to Thierry but to Lamartine and Vigny, to the young Hugo, to George Sand, to Michelet, to Flaubert, to Loti and to many others. It was the example of his daring that taught men to break boldly, perhaps too boldly sometimes, with literary tradition. He is the source not of beauties alone but of faults, of those exaggeration of language in pursuit of emotional effect that mar the writing even of such romantic masters as Hugo. For there was an affectation even of simplicity in Chateaubriand, that was the very antithesis of classic restraint, though this last had itself become a mannerism during the eighteenth century. As M. Faguet has happily put it, "he insisted that this indefinite imitation should cease, that France should have a literature of her own not a borrowed one, that since she was not pagan she should drop mythology in poetry, that since she was modern she should not have an ancient literature." And that was to invite a reaction from the sixteenth century as well as the seventeenth, from Rousard as well as from Racine.

We cannot better conclude this study of Chateaubriand's style than by the comparison of Joubert<sup>1</sup> who says that the

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries*, 177.

style of *Paul and Virginia* resembles a statue of white marble, that of Chateaubriand a statue of bronze cast by Lysippus. The former is more polished, the latter more brilliantly colored. Chateaubriand takes for his matter, sky, earth, and hell. Saint-Pierre would choose a well lighted landscape. The style of the one has a fresher and younger air. That of the other is more ancient, as though it were the style of all time. Saint-Pierre seems to choose what is purest and richest in the language; Chateaubriand takes from all, even from vicious literatures, but he makes them undergo a veritable transformation. Like that famous metal which at the burning of Corinth was formed from the fusion of all others, so the language of Chateaubriand fuses all his thoughts in celestial fire.

It may be admitted that the limitations of his genius were almost as striking as that genius itself. His imagination gave a wonderful utterance to the feelings of his own and the following generation. It did little or nothing to direct or develop their thought. But yet his novels are a cardinal point in the evolution of the French literary spirit and of French fiction. They mark, perhaps, the most important date since the renaissance. For, as Madame de Staël prepared the way for the romantic school in the realm of thought, philosophy, and criticism, so Chateaubriand became its master in the realm of art and of creative imagination.

BENJAMIN W. WELLS.